



**THE
HYDRA
EFFECT**

REVELATIONS AND BETRAYAL IN MEXICO CITY

A JADEANNE STONE MEXICO ADVENTURE
ANA MANWARING

Praise for Ana Manwaring's JadeAnne Stone Mexico Adventures

The Hydra Effect

Jan M. Flynn, award-winning author of *Corpse Pose: and Other Tales*

JadeAnne heads to Mexico City for a break from her partner, and now ex-boyfriend. But her sharp intelligence, curiosity, and inability to stay in her own lane, land her in a snarl of trouble. In short order, she's evading drug cartel thugs, uncovering a human trafficking network, and confronting high-level Mexican politicians with questionable connections, all in a lushly realized setting one can just about smell. *And taste* – JadeAnne might be in the middle of a gunfight, but she's never immune to the temptation of a good plate of tacos *al pastor*. She and her loyal dog Pepper are a team you can't help but cheer for.

Set Up

Heather Haven, multi-award-winning author of the *Alvarez Family Murder Mysteries*

This is a blowout of a story. It starts on the backroads of Mexico in the middle of the night—just a woman, a dog, and Mexican Banditos—and escalates from there. If you are looking for a fast-paced, action-filled thriller about the adventures of a young PI and her lethal but well-trained dog, this will be your cup of tea. Or should I say margarita? Jack Reacher step aside. You have met

your match in JadeAnne Stone.

JC Miller, author of the bestseller, *Vacation*

A routine investigation takes a mysterious, chilling turn when JadeAnne is abducted at gunpoint then deposited in an opulent, albeit creepy manor. Moment-by-moment, her story unfolds in real time as she experiences the sights, sounds, and myriad flavors of Mexico, the underworld of political corruption and high-stakes criminal activity roiling beneath the surface. When nothing is as it appears, and no one can be trusted, Jade's adrenaline surges—her mettle is tested. Told with humor and humility, grit and beauty, this page turner delivers.

CT Markee, author of the *Otherworld Tales, Irish/Abaddon Series*

...a fast moving tale of crime and danger in Mexico. JadeAnne Stone and her dog, Pepper, get in a custom camper van and drive straight into trouble in the first chapter: a missing person, a kidnapping, a drug cartel, and a suspected murder. The plotline is devious and surprising. There are plenty of twists and turns in the story to keep you engaged. This is a complicated well-crafted story...I absolutely love the descriptions. It's a good read that I highly recommend.

Kirkus Reviews

“With a likable duo and a vivid, appealing setting, this adventure series is off to a promising start.”

The Hydra Effect, A JadeAnne Stone Mexico Adventure ©2019 by Ana Manwaring. All rights reserved. No part of this book may be used or reproduced in any manner whatsoever, including internet usage, without written permission from del Valle Books, except in the case of brief quotations embodied in critical articles and reviews.

Second Edition
First Printing, 2019

Book design and format by Lisa Orban
Cover by Villa Design

This is a work of fiction. Names, characters, places, and incidents are either the product of the author's imagination or are used fictionally, and any resemblance to actual persons, living or dead, business establishments, events or locales is entirely coincidental.

ISBNs

978-1-64456-460-8 [Paperback]

978-1-64456-461-5 [Mobi]

978-1-64456-462-2 [ePub]

978-1-64456-463-9 [Audiobook]

Library of Congress Control Number: 2022936042



INDIES UNITED PUBLISHING HOUSE, LLC
P.O. BOX 3071
QUINCY, IL 62305-3071
indiesunited.net

DEDICATION

To

Marty Smith

You opened the door to Mexico for me.

and

Lucia Rangel

Muchas gracias, mi maestra de español.

Other Books by Ana Manwaring

Set Up (2022)

COMING IN 2022

August 17

Nothing Comes After Z

November 16

Coyote

THE HYDRA EFFECT

Revelations and Betrayal in Mexico City



A JadeAnne Stone
Mexico Adventure

ANA MANWARING



INDIES UNITED PUBLISHING HOUSE, LLC

CHAPTER ONE



Lura's Funeral

Wednesday, August 8, 2007

Heat seared across my back; someone had me in their sights. I scanned the wide plaza bordered by the church and a low, ornate, red-painted building, but I couldn't see anything that looked out of place for Coyoacan. No *malos hombres* behind the well-pruned park trees or black phantoms in my peripheral vision sighting sniper rifles from the rooftops along Calle Felipe Carrillo. As if I'd actually see my assassin. I hurried across Plaza Hidalgo toward La Iglesia de San Juan Bautista.

I couldn't shake Senator Polo Aguirre's hateful outburst after my friend's death last week, "I hold JadeAnne Stone responsible for the death of my cousin." And Aguirre was a dangerous man, —a criminal involved with marijuana and heroin cartels—hell, he headed up a drug cartel, didn't he? Wealthy and powerful, he had the backing of Mexico's ruling class. I had my dog and a prayer.

But *no importa la culpa*, if the senator wanted to retaliate against me because his kingpin rival in Ixtapa, Arturo Rodriguez, blew up his cousin Lura on the pier in Zihuatanejo, then he had the means to do it.

I hurried on.

Parking in the Coyoacán district of Mexico City was a joke on a good day, and I was afraid I'd be late to

Lura's funeral. I'd driven the *cuota*, toll road, Mexico 95, from Acapulco that morning after a lousy night's sleep in a rent-by-the-hour motel recommended by the waiter at my resort hotel in Papanoa. Located near the highway on the pimply backside of the posh Acapulco hotel district, the motel was filthy with trash, both on the ground and on two legs. But it was late and I was too exhausted to search for something better.

Revelers appeared to be coming or going from the disco next door, which had cranked up the volume of the music so loud that the shock of the bass almost felt like the bomb blast I'd survived in Zihua—the one that killed my friend Lura. I'd peeked out my door a couple of times when the thumping and screaming got particularly obnoxious and was reminded that most hookers don't look like Julia Roberts in *Pretty Woman*. God, what an ugly lot—and they're screamers. “*Ay Papi! Cójeme Papito, eres mi rey.*” Well, if I ever needed to “do it” in Spanish, I'd know how.

The plaza was filled with vendors. I noticed a couple of kids selling hippie paraphernalia—Mayan braided wristlets, peace sign earrings and pendants, Balinese batik shifts, tie-dye headbands, Rasta-colored t-shirts—the usual stuff found on any street vendor's table in Berkeley. The pollution that afternoon stank and hung yellow and gritty around the vendors and their customers. I could barely breathe, and scurrying across the plaza had me gasping so heavily that I slowed down, forced to catch my breath. A clown proffered me a bouquet of helium balloons while a white-clad man pushed an ice cream cart by, his bell jangling. I salivated. A scoop of coconut ice cream would have been a balm for my smog-irritated throat, but I swallowed hard and hurried on.

“*Lay-dee, señora. Tengo tu futuro.*”

I glanced toward the throaty voice. A gypsy-like

bruja sat at a folding table and laid out Tarot cards on a black velvet cloth. Seeing my interest, she pulled a card from the deck in her palm and displayed the Knight of Swords. I slowed down.

“*Venga, lay-dee. Así es el futuro.*” She swept the displayed layout to the side and placed the card in the middle of her cloth. “A *príncipe* looks for you, señorita.” She paused and extracted the King of Hearts from within her deck and placed it over the first card with a meaningful look. I started to move on, but she flicked a third card out of the pack and crossed it over the King. A man lay dead with a forest of swords sticking out of his back.

“*¡Ay! ¡Dios mío!*” The witch crossed herself and gathered up the cards, her wrinkled, bony hands moving like the wings of a hummingbird.

My heart dropped into my gut and shivers ran up my spine. Someone walking on my grave. I hurried the last couple hundred feet to the church. Well-heeled mourners in small groups filed between the massive, scarred wooden doors leading into the dim interior. Most of the women appeared to have stepped from the pages of *Vogue* magazine, and I could see a lot of important jewelry sparkling on fingers and ears and around necks and wrists. I stood back to calm down, admiring the lovely relief sculpture on the façade, and checking out the attendees as they arrived, hoping to see someone I knew. Like Anibal.

I glanced at my watch. Last minute mourners in limousines and chauffeur-driven SUVs drew up to the curb opposite the main doors. Uniformed drivers helped rich urbanites, *chilangos*, out of the vehicles and onto the sidewalk. It was obvious by the unusual lumps under jackets that some of these drivers were really bodyguards. Drug mafia, I supposed. I mean, do senators need bodyguards? I wouldn't know. I realized,

too, that there were way more armed police in the area than should be normal for the funeral of an American. Again, my skin rippled with the thought of being sighted in somebody's crosshairs. I shuddered and pushed through the crowd into the church.

After the bright haze in the plaza, it took my eyes several seconds to see in the shadowy interior. I could hear the sounds of clothes rustling and jewelry jingling, coughing, the thump as someone's butt landed too hard on the pew, and what may have been muted sobs floating in the pious atmosphere. It struck me that there was no music, no conversation, no babies crying; there lacked life at this celebration of death.

Lura would be pissed off. She'd have wanted a wild Irish wake. "Let's all get drunk and dance and tell funny stories," she'd have said. Maybe that would come later. The phone message I'd received from Lura's cousin Anibal two days before only said where and when the funeral would take place.

I made my way up the center aisle toward the altar, looking for a place to sit and made out the Aguirre family in the front pew: Senator Polo Aguirre sitting ramrod straight, eyes forward, and absolutely still; a thin, bent woman perched to his right, swaddled in black—black dress, floppy-brimmed hat draped in a black veil, black gloves. The Matriarch.

To his left, a grey-haired man and a small woman with short blonde hair leaned into each other. The woman appeared bird-like, her movements quick and restless. She reminded me of Lura in a way. Next to the blonde sat another woman whose hair shone dark and glossy. She leaned in to speak to the man next to her and I could see she was wearing dark glasses. I'd noticed other people wearing dark glasses inside and thought it must be a disguise for the drug people. The woman had to be Lura's sister Alejandra, or Alex, as

Lura had called her, and I bet she wore them to hide swollen eyes. I assumed the man next to her was her husband, Jason.

And then I saw him. Anibal. He was straining around in his seat to view the crowd. Looking for someone?

Our eyes locked for a heart-stopping moment then he started out of his pew. I wanted to see him, and I wanted to run away and hide. What if he blamed me, like his half-brother, the senator, did? My stomach clenched and my skin prickled. I backed up the aisle and fled into a rear pew. The hard looks of a pair of burly, neck-less gorillas with suspicious bulges discouraged me and I stumbled back into the aisle.

Anibal had made it halfway up the aisle, a hint of a smile on his lips. Butterflies danced in my heart—no mistaking it. I'd flirted with him before the explosion. A smothering blackness drifted down from the nave's ribbed vault and settled around me. My muscles went weak, and I staggered forward, jostled by the crowd now rushing for seats.

Oh, God, I can't! I can't. It was too soon. Lura was dead, my client was dead, drug cartel people were mad at me, my boyfriend had dumped me, and the Aguirre family blamed me for everything. How could I get involved with one of them? I simply needed to pay my respects and head out of Dodge.

I felt as exposed here in the church as I had outside, and my neck hairs were damp again. I needed to sit down and blend in. Ahead of me in the aisle, I saw a pew with only three mourners. One sported a familiar square head. It couldn't be. Zocer was dead, wasn't he? Didn't I see him killed trying to save Lura in the blast?

Elated, I rushed toward him and collided with Anibal.

“JadeAnne! Where've you been? Why haven't you

answered my messages? I've—we've—been so worried about you—Polo too. And the whole family. We've got a seat for you. C'mon."

He took my hand and pulled me toward the family pew. This was certainly a change from the hateful outburst a week earlier. To give the guy credit, though, he did stand up for me against Aguirre when that maniac tried to scapegoat me.

"Ani, no. No! I can't sit with your family. That's reserved for the...well, the family."

"We're expecting you, Jade. Besides, what about that night at the Krystal? I thought—"

Anibal went silent. We'd reached the family's pew and all Aguirre eyes turned on us. The men stood up and waited until I sat. I packed in next to Jason and sat down as Lura's coffin was lugged in by several gorilla-guys and placed on the waiting stand. The priest in purple robes appeared with his incense and smudged the high altar. I guess he was afraid this crowd would bring in some bad juju. Judging from what I'd seen of the Aguirre family, the padre was right-on.

When the incense disbursed, the prayers began. I hadn't been raised in the Catholic Church and had only experienced Mass a few times in childhood after a Saturday night sleepover with a Catholic girlfriend. Most of the congregation knew the words, when to stand, when to kneel, and when to sit back down. I followed Anibal's lead and, thirty minutes later, found myself kneeling at the communion railing with my mouth wide to receive a small wafer and a slurp of some pretty awful tasting wine from the same chalice as everyone else.

We took communion in the first group since we were sitting in the first row. I dreaded the hours it was going to take to move what I estimated to be three or four hundred mourners through communion. But I was

wrong, it took all of fifteen minutes. That priest knew how to manage a crowd.

After Christ's body and blood fortified the congregation, the rest of the family, sans Anibal, clustered at the closed coffin. I squeezed my eyes shut against the memory of Lura's burned body suspended in the doorway of Ristorante Mare e Pece's exploding kitchen.

"Is she going to be buried here?" I whispered to Anibal, hoping to switch my thought train.

"No, Uncle Beto is taking her home to L.A.," he whispered in reply. "They'll have a memorial there and a burial service. My aunt and uncle are pretty broken up."

"Those are Lura's parents?" I asked, gesturing to the grey-haired man and his tiny blonde wife.

"Yeah, and that's Alex, my cousin, and her husband." He gestured with his chin, eyes red and full.

The group stood at Lura's coffin, holding hands, crying.

"Who's the lady in black?"

He sniffed, and blew his nose into a pressed white handkerchief that had materialized out of nowhere. "Aunt Lidia, Polo's mother. She arranged the service—all these people are her friends, Polo's colleagues, and government VIPs."

"Lidia has some dangerous-looking friends. Do you know many of them?"

"No. I was never part of this group. Aunt Lidia doesn't completely embrace me as family—just like Polo."

"That reminds me, I thought I saw Zocer back there." I swiveled around toward the pew with the square-headed man, but he was no longer there.

"Impossible. He's dead. His funeral was yesterday."

"You went?"

“No, private family funeral.”

I lapsed into silence as the family filed back into our pew. No testimonials to Lura?

The organist began to play something from Beethoven. Mourners streamed up to the coffin- and left flowers, mementos, candles, stuffed animals, and dolls on the lid. Or they just touched it. Some knelt and prayed. The bodyguards escorted their charges and stood back, scowling at the congregation while the mourners said their “goodbyes.” The procession went on and on and on.

The music changed from *Amazing Grace* and *The King of Love Mine Shepherd Is* to out and out dirges. I recognized Verdi’s *Dies irae* from the Requiem Mass, and some Bach. I felt the low notes more than heard them and was moved to tears. It wasn’t that Lura and I were so close—we’d been acquainted for less than two weeks, but I felt uncomfortably responsible. If I hadn’t accepted the case from her banker husband, Daniel Worthington, would he have killed her? No, this was naïve thinking. He had known where she was and intended to kill her from the start. I’d been set up to flush her from the protection of her cousin, Senator Aguirre, before she connected Worthington to a major money laundering scheme.

I’d been chewing it over to the point of obsession for days. That is, in between mourning my recent breakup and looking over my shoulder for Rodriguez’s goons. I hadn’t come to feel any more comfortable with the conclusions I’d drawn about what really was happening than before I’d drawn them, and as far as Worthington was concerned, his intentions had been lost the moment Anibal put a bullet through his head to save me from being murdered. It was all too bizarre, and now I was sitting in a pew in a colonial church in Mexico City mourning someone I barely knew as

though I were one of the family—holding hands with her sister’s husband and leaning on her cousin, her best friend—crying. Am I a hypocrite? I just wished it would end and I could go hug my dog and go home. But home would be so empty without Dex.

“Where’s Pepper?” Anibal asked me sotto voce.

“In the *combi*. Is Coyoacán a safe *colonia*?” I replied under my breath.

“Depends where it’s parked. This is a pretty wealthy district, but you’re not safe anywhere in Mexico. That’s why all these *ricos* have bodyguards.” He laughed softly.

“It’s on Xicoténcatl,” I stumbled over the indigenous name, “just off Centenario. Pepper’s guarding—he’ll tear any carjacker’s arm off and beat him with it,” I said with more confidence than I felt. He didn’t tear any arms off when Aguirre’s thugs hijacked me off Ruta 200.

“Don’t think about it, Jade, it’ll just bring you down,” he whispered, giving my hand a little squeeze.

How did he know?

“We’re going to Aunt Lidia’s after. You’re coming, aren’t you?”

“I don’t think so, Ani. I need to get going. Find a place to sleep. I didn’t have a very restful night.”

“You’ll stay with me. I’ve got a house in La Condesa. There’s a great coffee house nearby, La Selva. We’ll go read international newspapers and drink espresso in the morning.”

Anibal’s warm smile and gorgeous coal eyes looked inviting. I was tempted.

“Uh-uh, no way, Jose.” I drew my hand back into my lap and shifted toward the aisle to focus on the mourners coming forward. Was he crazy? With what his family thought of me? Anibal slumped away, his jaw tight.

Two men in dark glasses, trailed by their burly boys, headed the column of people approaching the casket. They glanced side to side as if looking for someone. Anibal stiffened, and I studied him from under my too-long bangs, hoping he wouldn't notice I was watching him. As the men came even with our pew, Anibal turned abruptly toward me and sank his head into my chest, making sobbing sounds, and I found myself staring into my own eyes mirrored back at me from the closer man's sunglasses. He had a sneering little mouth under a scraggly mustache and beard, and I felt the hatred he projected toward me. Or was it toward Anibal? The look chilled me to the bone.

The men passed on, tapped the coffin, and moved off toward an exit. I watched until the door closed and whispered, "Okay, Anibal. What was that about?"

He sat up, stopped his phony sobbing, and shifted away from me.

"I mean it, Anibal. What's going on?"

"I miss Lura so much," he said, voice catching on her name. He gave me a sad sack smile.

"So do I, but why don't I believe that's the whole story here?"

He turned back to me with an angelic expression. "I don't know."

"Yes you do; you knew those men. You didn't want them to see you," I accused. As if anyone in the church hadn't seen us up here on display in the front pew.

"Who are they, Anibal Aguirre?"

"Shhh. I'll tell you after—on the way to Aunt Lidia's," he mouthed, rolling his eyes in a feeble attempt to indicate he didn't want the others to know this big secret.

I sat back and shut up. How much longer would this go on? I couldn't see any way to get around it—I was going to be properly introduced to Lura's family soon.

The heavy atmosphere weighed on me like water. I didn't want to meet the Aguirre-Laylors, that was for sure. Not if Aguirre had told them what he thought about my involvement in their daughter's death. It wasn't true, but I felt so conflicted. Did I give myself too much credit? Aguirre probably wouldn't speak my name. And he'd never say anything to his brother, Lura's father. Neither would Ani speak to Aguirre. And the events leading up to her death came so fast and furious, Lura wouldn't have had time to talk to her sister. I rationalized and let my tense shoulders slip from around my ears. These folks didn't have a clue who I was, and I'd keep it like that.

I slid closer to Anibal and perched on the edge of the pew. "I've gotta go, Ani. I wish I could visit with your family, but I just don't think now's the time."

"You can't go, JadeAnne. We're expecting you," he replied a bit too loud.

"I'm sorry, really. Please pass my condolences on to everyone, especially your aunt and uncle, but Pepper has been in the bus too long and it's warm. I've got to take care of him." I started to collect my purse and get up.

"Jah-dey, please," he whined. "You can't leave now."

"Leopoldo, control that ill-mannered boy," a reedy voice quavered.

Startled, I looked down the row. Aguirre faced his mother. "Yes Mother, I'll take care of it presently." He turned toward me with a look that could kill. I shrank back into my place and pretended to concentrate on the priest who had reappeared into view now that the mourners had said goodbye. Good, we're getting out of here.

"Anibal, you are disturbing your aunt's peace. Please be quiet," Aguirre whispered in his ridiculous

formality. “Oh, and Miss Stone, my mother wishes to have your company at our gathering. I hope you won’t disappoint her.”

I smiled weakly and shook my head. Beyond him, I could see the old crow nodding, one bony hand clutching at her Leopoldo.

The padre led the remaining congregation in the Lord’s Prayer. “*Padre nuestro, que estás en el cielo. Santificado sea tu nombre. Venga tu reino. Hágase tu voluntad en la tierra como en el cielo. . .*”

Few remained in the cavernous church. Mostly old ladies in black mantillas, Lidia’s friends, no doubt. Squirming around, I couldn’t see any men in sunglasses and it came to me that I didn’t feel like I was being watched anymore.

“*Perdona nuestras ofensas, como también nosotros perdonamos a los que nos ofenden. . .*”

Maybe that’s what I was supposed to do—forgive. God was telling me right there at Lura’s funeral, I had to forgive. But whom? The list was long.

“And deliver us from evil for thine is the kingdom and the power and the glory, forever and ever.”

Okay, I’d forgive myself. And then I’d let the Aguirre family forgive me, too. Amen.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I'm immensely grateful to everyone who has helped me turn the JadeAnne Stone Mexico Adventures from a heart-stopping encounter with narco thugs on a lonely Mexican highway to a published series of books.

First to Lisa Towles for hooking me up with her amazing, creative publishing support network: Editor Cindy Davis has brightened and tightened my writing, Tatiana Villa of Villa Designs has made the covers pop and Lisa Orban of Indies United Publishing House has taken a chance on me and JadeAnne. You've all brought a new level of professionalism and excellence to my books and I can't imagine doing this without you. Thank you.

A special shout-out to both my longstanding critique groups: *Wordweavers*—Kathy Rueve, Kerry Granshaw, Malena Eljumaily, and *JAM*—J.C. Miller and Mark Pavlichek, and my newest group: *Novelistas*—Jan M. Flynn, Crissi Langwell and Heather Chavez. Without your endless readings and total support, I would never have come so far.

To Alana Weaver—a trophy for beta reading, editing and critiquing in 24 hours! And huge thanks to all my Sisters in Crime siblings especially Lisa Towles, M.M. Chouinard, Thena MacArthur and Susan Alice Bickford, you've answered my questions, guided my process, and held my hand throughout COVID. You are the best! A Million thanks.

As always, my darling David has stood by me, encouraging me to get started, keep going and “hurry up and publish those books!” He’s my greatest inspiration.

Finally to you, my readers—without you the story would never come to life. I hope you enjoy *The Hydra Effect*, book two of the JadeAnne Stone Mexico Adventures, and watch for books 3 and 4 coming out this year. If you have liked something in JadeAnne’s adventure, please leave a review on Amazon, Goodreads and tell your friends.

Y, por fin, ¡Muchísimas gracias a todos!

About Ana Manwaring



Ana teaches creative writing and autobiographical writing through Napa Valley College in California's wine country. She is the founder of JAM Manuscript Consulting where she coaches writers, assists in developing projects, and copyedits.

When Ana isn't helping other writers, she posts book reviews, personal stories, and tips on writing craft and the business of writing at Building a Better Story. She's branded cattle in Hollister, lived on houseboats, consulted *brujos*, visited every California mission, worked for a PI, swum with dolphins, and outrun gun totin' maniacs on lonely Mexican highways—the inspiration for The JadeAnne Stone Mexico Adventures. Read about her transformative experiences living in Mexico at www.saintsandSkeletons.com.

With a B.A. in English and Education and an M.A. in Linguistics, Ana is finally able to answer her

mother's question, "What are you planning to do with that expensive education?" Be a paperback writer.

Learn more at www.anamanwaring.com

If you had as much fun reading this book as I had writing it, please consider going to Amazon, Nook, Kobo or wherever you purchased your copy, and leaving a positive review. Favorable reviews help authors continue to write books for your enjoyment.

To find out about new books and upcoming events, please take a moment to sign up for my newsletter, Writing on the Wall: <http://www.anamanwaring.com>.